

INBO Sustainability Action Plan

Date: 27 May 2026

Background

For an organisation such as INBO, which studies biodiversity and supports nature conservation policy, sustainability in its own operations is of crucial importance. By explicitly incorporating sustainability into its organisational practices, INBO aims to fulfil its social responsibility and play an active role in combating biodiversity loss and climate change. In this way, we strengthen our role as a model within the public sector and actively contribute to a sustainable, climate-resilient and circular Flanders.

As part of the Transformative Change programme, an **internal working group on sustainability** has been set up. The Sustainability Working Group has drawn up this action plan, structured around three key areas:

1. *What is already happening at INBO in terms of sustainability?*
2. *What is already planned?*
3. *What new actions are we proposing through the working group?*

The focus is on actions that can be achieved during this legislative term, up to and including 2029.

The framework of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals provides inspiration and direction in this regard. The Sustainability Working Group **is initially focusing on reducing the** organisation's **ecological footprint**. Other aspects are being addressed within INBO by, amongst others, the Wellbeing Working Group and our Diversity Officer.

As an organisation, we form part of the Flemish Government. The Facilities Department is strongly committed to [sustainability](#), for example in the areas of buildings, mobility and catering. INBO can align itself with this approach.

Furthermore, we align our operations with the [Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development](#).

1. What is INBO already doing in terms of sustainability?

Sustainable building and site management

- **INBO sites:**
 - **VAC Herman Teirlinck:** a passive building with a high sustainability rating
 - **Geraardsbergen:**

The buildings at Gaverstraat 35, including the laboratories, have been connected to the sewerage system since 2015. They were thoroughly renovated with a focus on energy efficiency, comfort and accessibility. The

[GRO sustainability index](#) was used as a guideline. The [renovation](#) included, amongst other things:

- thermal insulation of façades and roofs;
 - installation of heat pumps (in combination with gas-fired boilers);
 - energy-efficient ventilation with heat recovery;
 - a building management system with energy monitoring;
 - rainwater harvesting;
 - installation of solar panels on both buildings and the warehouse;
 - renewed external joinery and sun blinds.
- **Grimminge:**
 - The roof is insulated with cellulose.
 - Heating is provided by (domestically sourced) wood pellets.
 - There is a solar water heater and solar panels.
 - **Linkebeek:**
 - The roofs and walls are insulated.
 - New high-efficiency glazing in the administrative building, whilst retaining the window frames
 - The old boiler in the administrative building has been replaced by a condensing boiler
 - The windows and doors of the caretaker's flat have been refurbished.
 - Solar panels have been installed on the roof of the offices.
- When carrying out refurbishments, we opt for sustainable and renewable building materials.
 - For the landscaping of our **grounds**, we opt for biodiverse and climate-friendly planting. We allow space for natural processes and adopt smart mowing management. Grassland vegetation is mown twice a year using a sinusoidal pattern, and the cuttings are removed. Exotic species are controlled. We plant trees. We provide nesting sites, create nature-friendly water features and use native plant species.
 - As required by law, we do not use pesticides when maintaining our sites.
 - **Data storage** is centralised, which is more energy-efficient.

Mobility

- We are committed to reducing CO₂ emissions resulting from business travel using INBO vehicles and private vehicles:
 - We promote eco-driving and public transport via our intranet.
 - The Flemish Government fully reimburses commuting costs for journeys made by public transport. Those who cycle to work receive a cycling allowance.
 - INBO staff can purchase train tickets via a form on the intranet.
 - INBO staff can lease a bicycle for their commute.

- Standard bicycles, electric bikes, folding bikes and mountain bikes are available to staff.
- All INBO sites have charging points for electric cars, and in Brussels and Geraardsbergen there are also charging points for electric bikes.
- The use of private cars is discouraged and strictly monitored.
- Company cars are used optimally thanks to a track-and-trace system.
- When purchasing new company cars, we opt for more fuel-efficient and environmentally friendly models.
- For business travel, we take into account the duration and cost to choose the most sustainable means of transport.
- We take a critical look at intercontinental business travel and replace it with online participation where appropriate.
- When selecting a venue for an event, we take into account its accessibility by public transport.

Procurement policy, catering & events

- When purchasing materials, clothing and gifts for staff or speakers, we take into account fair working conditions at the manufacturer and the product's overall carbon footprint, budget permitting. For example, we buy through charities such as Oxfam or eco-friendly websites such as Greengiving.
- At **events involving external guests**, we offer **vegetarian meals only**.
This decision was taken following an internal survey in 2022: there was insufficient support to make meals at internal events vegetarian as well. As far as is practicable – in practical and budgetary terms – we take into account sustainability criteria such as local, seasonal, organic, fair trade, the availability of sustainability labels, etc.
- Since June 2025, the Facilities Department has had a new catering policy in place across the Flemish Administrative Centres, with a particular focus on sustainability and local produce.
- To prevent food waste, we impose fines at events if participants do not cancel in good time. We try to estimate quantities as accurately as possible.
- Laptops must last for 4 years before being replaced. Smartphones must last for 3 years.
- It is possible to have your smartphone repaired, unless it is a field smartphone. The IT department will contribute up to €100 towards the repair costs. After repair, the phone must be used for a further one year before you can request a new one.
- It is possible to purchase a [Fairphone](#) or a refurbished/returned device.
- Laptops are purchased under a framework contract with the Flemish Government. They carry eco-labels, packaging materials are recycled and waste is offset. The casing is made from recycled material.
- Laptops and other IT equipment, such as external monitors, are donated to the non-profit organisation [Close the Gap](#) via INBO after use.
- The [guidelines](#) for the use of generative AI focus on sustainability.

2. What are the plans?

Sustainable building and site management

- **Geraardsbergen**
 - We **are optimising the infrastructure for processing soil samples**, with a particular focus on energy efficiency and available budgets. We are also investigating the **impact on energy consumption**, including ways to organise dust removal in a sustainable manner.
 - We **are analysing and optimising all energy flows** via a comprehensive **monitoring system**. This system will automatically collect, store and report data via a dashboard. Based on this, we can implement **targeted energy-saving measures** for, amongst other things, refrigeration, freezing and laboratory equipment, and provide accurate data for **energy performance certificates (EPC-NR)**.
- **Grimminge**
 - The **caretaker's cottage** is being renovated. The building's function is changing to a **coffee corner with a washroom** for the nursery workers. This will enable us to heat and manage the building more efficiently.
 - **Solar panels** are being installed on the **roof of the caretaker's house**.
 - Full implementation of the Raspaillebos – Markvallei nature conservation project
- **Linkebeek**
 - A **new hatchery and a collection building** are being constructed using sustainable materials, in accordance with the principles of the [GRO](#) **sustainability index**. The **gas boiler is being replaced by a heat pump**. Both buildings are designed to operate on a **net-zero energy basis**, with the exception of the fish farming operations themselves.
 - **Energy consumption monitoring** is being refined: the various energy consumption figures are being better mapped and tracked, to enable targeted adjustments.
- **Circularity in building maintenance**

In the maintenance of our buildings, we focus on circularity and extending service life:

 - Equipment and installations are subject to **preventive maintenance**, and parts are repaired or replaced rather than discarding entire systems.
 - For future renovations and replacements, we opt for **reusable or recyclable** materials wherever possible, to manage material flows efficiently and minimise waste. This ensures **sustainable, cost-effective and environmentally friendly maintenance**, whilst respecting the building and its surroundings.
 - In the future, we aim to embed circularity even more firmly in our approach to the maintenance of technical installations.

Mobility

- We aim to make our vehicle fleet greener and replace it entirely with electric vehicles where this is suitable for INBO fieldwork.

3. New initiatives

We are proposing new actions based on a brainstorming session held by the sustainability working group in June 2025. Over the coming years, we will evaluate these actions and build on them further.

Mobility

- New proposal for a business travel policy
 - As a general guideline, we will take the train when the journey time from Brussels is 8 hours or less.
 - With a link to the CO₂ calculator and sustainability criteria for hotels
 - Amend the application form for business travel: provide a more specific justification for why the journey is necessary; pay particular attention to the approval process for travel outside Europe
- The possibility of using Cambio car-sharing is being investigated.

Procurement policy, catering & events

- From now on, catering at internal events will also be entirely vegetarian, sustainable, and preferably local and seasonal.
- Avoid disposable drink packaging during meetings and events at all sites; consider purchasing additional glasses and carafes
- Regularly gather suggestions within INBO regarding sustainable catering and framework contracts, and discuss these with Het Facilitair Bedrijf
- Pay attention to sustainability when purchasing laboratory equipment
- Include sustainability as a criterion in tender specifications, where the situation and budget permit. The template for tender specifications will be amended.

IT & research

- Raise awareness of digital hygiene: do not store data unnecessarily, as this consumes energy
 - Multi-pronged approach
 - Through Open Science initiatives (Research Data Management best practice, archiving, open data policy, etc.)
 - From IT, possibly combined with a reminder from the Library to upload data records to PURE
 - Through internal communication
- Make it clear in AI guidelines that generating images and video requires significantly more energy and water
 - The AI working group amends the guidelines

- Sustainability in research
 - Pay attention to sustainable transport, materials, catering, etc. when drafting project proposals; whilst doing so, strike a balance between sustainability costs and competitiveness
 - Refer to INBO rules in project proposals and agree on sustainability arrangements with project partners, whilst taking their circumstances into account

Communication & policy

- Activities of the Sustainability Working Group
 - Meets three times a year to exchange information, monitor sustainability within INBO, devise new initiatives, communicate within INBO, etc.
 - List of tips on Drive, e.g. sustainable caterers, venues, service providers, etc.
 - Internal Google Chat channel 'Sustainable INBO' (found under 'Spaces'), to exchange tips, ask for feedback or advice, announce initiatives, etc.
 - Action plan: evaluate annually what has been achieved and plan new initiatives
- Together with the Communications & Policy team:
 - Internal communication:
 - Update the intranet:
 - dedicated page on Sustainability:
 - update or integrate existing information
 - Make it easy to find via the homepage
 - Integrating information on sustainability into other topics (e.g. business travel, catering, ...)
 - Regular feature in the in-house magazine Inbotoop
 - Communicating what INBO is already doing
 - Highlighting good initiatives
 - Including: Sustainable business travel, collecting food waste from the Herman Teirlinck restaurant, ...
 - Recommending smartphone repairs
 - FAIRphone review by colleagues
 - Highlighting old and new guidelines
 - Encouraging a focus on sustainability, e.g.
 - Team-building: choosing a venue accessible by public transport & sustainable activities
 - Recommend stating public transport access in invitations to events and meetings with external parties
 - Focus on sustainable catering, including for small meetings and Inbotoog, e.g. avoiding plastic bottles
 - Incorporate this in a light-hearted way
 - Link to information on the intranet
 - campaign on Sustainability Day (on 10 October 2026)
 - External communication:
 - Update website text
 - Action plan on the website
 - Emphasise at events that vegetarian food is being served

- Use social media on Sustainability Day